

Artemis Alexiou & Rose Roberto (editors), *Women in Print 1: design and identities*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022. Pp. 304. ISBNs 9781800798427, 9781800798434, 9781789979787. PDF, ePUB, Paperback, £46. 42 monochrome illustrations.

Caroline Archer-Parré, Christine Moog & John Hinks (editors), *Women in Print 2: production, distribution and consumption*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022. Pp. 284. ISBNs 9781800798441, 9781800798458, 9781789979770. PDF, ePUB, Paperback, £51. 13 monochrome illustrations.

I enjoyed this pair of books immensely. Each consists of essays written by individual researchers, designers, historians, librarians, curators and artists offering a range of voices exploring women's roles in printing history. These two volumes reveal contributions by individuals previously obscured by lack of formal acknowledgement (both legally and in wider society) which of course makes researching their stories so difficult.

Examples discussed include Beatrice Warde's work with the Monotype Corporation and Elizabeth Newbery (1745 - 1821) publisher of hundreds of adult and children's books, who employed Thomas Bewick to illustrate some of the Newbery titles. The more well-known printmaker Letitia Byrne (1779–1849) taught etching and engraving by her father alongside her three sisters and brother as 'almost the only way for a woman to enter the profession' (Lyons, *Women in Print 1*: 63) who produced her first suite of etchings aged 14. Anne Lemoine's prolific publishing business producing hundreds of gothic bluebooks.

How joyous to read that women had been actively involved in all aspects of family-based print shops in America since the early seventeenth century. Only to later discover how they were excluded from formal training in letterpress composition - being taught 'typesetting of

straight matter only' over six weeks rather than the four-year apprenticeship offered to young men when print and production moved to larger-scale industrial settings (Roman, *Women in Print 1*: 85-87). Throughout the two volumes women were present yet excluded, conveniently named when printing without a licence to do so was illegal, but unacknowledged when credit or fair payment were due. This extended to most roles within the industry from production to selling, publishing to authorial. In the nineteenth century, at the time when women were grudgingly allowed to undertake 'unskilled' roles on cylinder printing machines 'as less likely than boy's to usurp the machineman's role without apprenticeship training' (Williams, *Women in Print 2*: 174), Florence Nightingale was pioneering in her development and publishing of healthcare statistics and information graphics for hospitals, becoming 'the first to use them effectively to advocate for change' (Roberto, *Women in Print 2*: 142).

Later came the inspirational Dun Emer and Cuala Presses in Ireland, employing only women, teaching skills such as letterpress, hand tinting and printmaking to produce books and broadsides inspired by the Kelmescott Press outputs and reintroduce indigenous crafts and national identity in Ireland (Griffith, *Women in Print 1*: 199-201). There was the establishment of the Women's Printing Society in London in 1876, I learned about the aesthetic principles of the Women's Social and Political Union, with membership cards designed by artist Sylvia Pankhurst. I enjoyed Anil Akyan Barnbrook's analysis of the Suffragette movement's use of printing and applied arts for guerrilla marketing to draw attention to their campaign for equal rights (particularly Marion Dunlop's rubber stamping inside the Houses of Parliament). The Suffragettes stamped and stencilled protests were akin to Banksy's modern day social commentary, the only difference being he was not arrested and imprisoned for expressing an opinion in print. Class constraints also added to women's

disadvantages, as noted in Wilson and Southworth's essay on women worker's at the Hogarth Press, and the reliance on working-class domestic staff to be able to write, create and publish. It is suggested that Nellie Boxall the Woolf's live-in servant was perhaps the first Hogarth Press assistant (rather than the upper-middle class employees) as she helped unpack the press when it first arrived (p. 224).

The last essay in Volume 2 is an exploration by Jess Baines of feminist printshops which takes us up to the late twentieth century, when access to print became less exclusive. It celebrates how print was used by women in 'taking control of our lives' (p. 240), from learning about basic medical procedures and health, to sharing skills. Women-run print studios published information cheaply and in high volume on their offset presses. Learning to print became not only 'a means to be heard' but also as feminists, proving women's ability to do a 'male' job. In the twenty-first century times have (mostly) changed - when I look around now I can see many print studios established and run by women as successful commercial and community enterprises. There is still much to learn about how women have overcome multiple obstacles to their roles within the field of print. These two volumes demonstrate that their contribution has been there all along and makes me eager to learn more about it. There are many leads to follow from these inspiring essays that will help reveal a wider picture, one that was previously obscured for far too long.

Sarah Bodman is an artist and researcher at the Centre for Print Research and Programme Leader for MA Multidisciplinary Printmaking at UWE Bristol. She is editor of the *Artist's Book Yearbook*, *Book Arts Newsletter* and *The Blue Notebook* journal for artists' books.